

# MAGIC KINGDOMS

Traditional stories, such as myths, legends and fairy tales have contributed to the beliefs and ideologies of most societies since time immemorial. Magic, which is one of the essential elements of many of these tales, liberates these narratives from the laws of mundane reality and enables the storyteller to invite their audience into another realm where symbolic characters can act out cryptic allegories. *Magic Kingdoms* explores how contemporary artists continue the tradition of enchanted storytelling, re-imagining the supernatural characters, worlds and themes from these ancient tales or making up their own new mythologies.

**Hannah Battershell's** works conjure alternate realities which are inspired by folk and fairy tales. They tell stories of seal kings in mysterious underwater worlds, daydream visions of anchoresses in isolated sanctuaries and magical green women foraging for mushrooms. **Jane Hoodless'** works re-interpret and question the conventional portrayals of characters from traditional stories. Her emaciated juvenile mermaid bears closer resemblance to infamous hoaxer P.T. Barnum's 'Feejee Mermaid' than the beautiful sirens of legend. Equally, her emotive *Witch-in-a-Bottle* references the dark episodes of social history where this folktale character was used to justify the horrific treatment of numerous older women during the witch trials in 16<sup>th</sup> Century central Europe.

**Byzantia Harlow's** *Witch's Bottle's* draw from a similar historical source to Hoodless' *Witch-in-a-Bottle* by referencing the folk practice of burying earthenware 'witch bottles' filled with magically sympathetic objects, such as hair and urine, as a charm to counteract spells cast by witches. These works are inspired by a type of witch bottle known as 'Bellarmine Jugs', some of which were excavated from the *Sea Venture* shipwreck in Bermuda. Similarly, *Cane Toad* alludes to her personal links to this region and is inspired by the practice of consuming the Bermudan cane toad's hallucinogenic venom to elicit visions of parallel spiritual dimensions.

**Alexi Marshall's** *Grief Is the Thing With Blood and Feathers* pays homage to Ana Mendieta's 1974 film *Blood Feathers* which documents a performance in which Mendieta transforms herself into a sacrificial bird-woman by covering herself in blood and then feathers. This bird-woman character has since become an important figure in Marshall's personal mythological universe, appearing in other works and possibly symbolically expressing the idea of renewal in her psyche.

**Brendan Hansbro's** drawings from his *Apocalypse* series of works re-interpret Jean Duvet's 16<sup>th</sup> Century *Apocalypse* engravings which illustrate the events described in the biblical *Revelation of St. John the Divine*, the last book of The New Testament. Hansbro's drawings reanimate this esoteric narrative about the end of days from a secular perspective, using it to encode and process the trauma of a serious mental health episode which he endured between 2003-2005.

*Magic Kingdoms* intends to present the practices of artists that make the magical elements of traditional stories new and strange again. Each artist uses their work to imagine enchanted other worlds which refract our own, symbolically model the structures of the psyche or reflect on elements of social history.

